



October 2024 Council Meeting

Date/Time: October 2, 2024, 10:00am-12:00pm

Location: NH Employment Security, 45 S. Fruit Street, Concord

Participants (14 voting members):

- Michelle Lewis
- Alexa Simmons
- Dr. Kimberly Nesbitt
- Athena Cote
- Jane Bard
- Rep. Debra DeSimone
- Kate Baker Demers
- Erin Pettingill (nominee)
- Christina Lachance (Director)
- Rebecca Woitkowski
- Chris Santaniello
- Matthew Robblee
- Shawn Jasper
- Laurie Foster
- Rich Lavers
- Dee Pouliot
- Christina D'Allesandro (nominee)

Guests: Dr. Jess Carson, Nathan Fink

Council Business (Christina Lachance)

- Christine Brennan, Council Co-Chair, couldn't make it today due to the surprise presentation of the Teacher of the Year Award.
- Tricia Tilley will no longer be co-chairing the Council, Chris S. will become the co-chair of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Motion to approve 6.19.2024 minutes (Kate Baker)

Seconded (Jane Bard)

Motion approved by consensus.

- Staffing changes in 2025: Council staff are currently funded through the Preschool Development Grant, which is ending at the end of 2025. The Departments will take on facilitation of Council for Thriving Children starting in 2025. Additional details are expected at the next Council meeting.
- Next meeting is expected to occur the first week in December, announcement will come out soon.

DHHS Updates (Chris Santaniello)

- NH's Child Care and Development Fund Plan was submitted July 1, 2024. Updates from the federal Office of Child Care are expected any day now. State will respond by November 30.
- The Bureau of Child Development and Head Start Collaboration is recruiting a new Bureau Chief given Jessie Davis' departure on September 19th.
- In addition to the Bureau Chief position, DHHS Bureau of Child Development and Head Start Collaboration is recruiting for other positions; Operations Manager, Accounting Clerk and Admin Secretary.

- As of Monday, September 30, approximately \$10 million went out to NH child care providers. In total \$151 million has gone to child care providers since the start of the pandemic.
 - Christina: The Forum for Youth Investment ranked NH as number 1 in multiple areas including the economy, investment in youth, health, and public health.

Preschool Development Grant Needs Assessment (Jess Carson, Research Assistant Professor, UNH Carsey School)

- Supported by many reviewers and contributors
- Recap of Project Plan
 - Taking Stock – the NH Preschool Development Grant (PDG) team didn't want to pile data on top of data, instead they wanted to inventory and synthesize the data we already have
 - What are some open questions? Supply, demand, family preference.
 - While developing the PDG Needs Assessment, Carsey made a proposal to the Couch Family Foundation to form a “Hub for Early Childhood Education Research” now the *New Hampshire Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE) Research Consortium* (nhece.org)
 - The consortium provides a home for current research publications and expanded opportunities for future research and collaborations.
- Deliverables for NH PDG
 - 1 research brief with original data: preschool offerings in NH public schools
 - 3 research synthesis papers: demand, supply, workforce
 - Demand: how many kids are there in the age group? What are they looking for in early care and education?
 - Supply: what's available? (beyond public preschool, what other care options are available?)
 - Workforce: what does the early childhood workforce need? What are the main barriers to recruitment and retention?
- Preschool Paper
 - Data collection on enrollment of preschoolers in public schools
- 3 papers as part of the Granite Guide to Early Childhood
 - More than 500 sources of information went into these papers
 - Identified gaps in the research
 - Each is 2 pages to make them more accessible
 - 4 more primers will be released this fall on 4 topics related to early childhood education (family cost, NH scholarships, cost of providing care, opportunities to improve stability of the early care and education sector in NH)
- Findings
 - Preschool in NH Public Schools
 - 144 preschool programs, only 10 serve exclusively children with individualized education plan
 - Implementation approaches are varied and not fully documented (i.e., funding streams, schedules, tuition scales, local demand, percentage of children with IEPs compared to those without IEPs)
 - Only 14% of programs are full day, full week offerings
 - Demand primer
 - Families make less-than-ideal tradeoffs for early care and education that fit schedules and budgets, but they widely agree on the importance of reliability
 - Supply primer

- Distribution of child care options: largely licensed care, unknowns around unpaid and paid home-based providers, a small number of Early Head Start and Head Start usage
 - Workforce primer
 - Compensation for early educators is low especially relative to their education, making it hard to recruit and retain workers that could expand supply.
- Next Steps for Carsey/NH ECE Research Consortium
 - Continue to aggregate and synthesize early care and education scholarship
 - Convene research partners, identify gaps
 - Find ways to offer complementary analytic support to the state
- **Questions**
 - Rebecca Woitkowski: interested in seeing the “what parents want” primer, also, did you find that there are limits on what communities can provide for public preschool, or do they adapt to the need?
 - Eileen Murphy: There are limitations – sometimes physical space, staffing, or funding.
 - Jess Carson: Many schools have waitlists, which indicates that they are not meeting the local need.
 - Kim Nesbitt: Some examples of funding models are provided in the paper. As the study progressed it became clear that school districts have been creative, and they respond to the needs of their communities in a variety of ways. It’s very helpful to see the variety of ways funding can be leveraged to support preschool.
 - Christina Lachance: are any children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) served in settings without typically development peers (children without IEPs)?
 - Alexa Simmons: There are some situations where this occurs, it often depends on the needs of the child with an IEP and the number of local children without IEPs who are interested in attending the public preschool program.
 - Michelle Lewis: There’s a continuum of settings that are offered for preschool and school age children, it’s supposed to be based on the needs of the individual child; one example we see is that some districts have programs where children are in an inclusive classroom part of the day, but a “self-contained” classroom for the afternoon (i.e., an autism classroom)

2025 NH Farm to School Pilot Program (Shawn Jasper, Commissioner, NH Dept of Agriculture)

- HB 1678 Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Program
- This is a pilot program with just \$241,000 included with this bill
- Under this bill, 10 school districts are eligible (one in each county) with approximately \$10,000 available to each school district. Unfortunately, thus far only 10% of funds have been committed. Recruiting additional districts is a challenge. The Department of Agriculture doesn’t have the capacity.
- Intentions of the program:
 - Foster school-farmer relationships, lessening supply chain disruptions, and increasing food security
 - Educate students, teachers, and school staff about local foods and the importance of supporting local agriculture
 - Increase profitability for New Hampshire farmers, fishermen, and food producers

- There may be federal matching funds that could supplement this program, but nothing concrete has come along yet.
- NH Farm to School, a program of the UNH Sustainability Institute will most likely support the pilot and could help with recruitment. A contract is being considered.
- Eligibility Requirements
 - One school district per county will be selected for the grant
 - Awarded school districts shall participate both years of the pilot program
 - Local school district must participate in National School Lunch Program
 - Foods purchased under this program shall originate in New Hampshire
 - Eligible foods include dairy, fish, pork, beef, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables, cider, and maple syrup
 - Food maybe served in the school breakfast, school lunch, or fresh fruit and vegetable programs
 - Program is reimbursement based
- The grant selection committee includes representatives from UNH Cooperative Extension, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture, a farmer, and an expert in child nutrition.
- Resources:
 - <https://nhfarmtoschool.org/nh-farm-to-school-policy/www.nhfarmtoschool.org/nh-farm-to-school-policy>
 - www.nhpr.org/nh-news/2024-07-22/a-new-law-will-help-some-nh-schools-access-local-food
 - <https://www.governor.nh.gov/news-and-media/governor-chris-sununu-signs-33-bills-law-vetoes-2>
- **Questions**
 - Michelle Lewis: How does this differ from the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program?
 - That is another person's area of expertise, it's a separate program. There are some challenges in coordinating various school nutrition programs in New Hampshire. This program is intended to be more flexible than some federal nutrition grants.
 - Christina D'Allesandro: How many districts are signed up out of the 10 available slots?
 - None are signed up yet; roll-out will occur in the coming weeks. Outreach to districts will be critical, districts haven't approached the Department to express interest. The hope is that this program can contract with NH Cooperative Extension. They are essentially a sister program to Dept. of Agriculture and are critical to managing the cost of programs like this.
 - Rep. DeSimone: Will there be any collaboration with high schools or colleges who have culinary programs and who could teach school age children about preservation of local food?
 - This is a good idea, but not something that's been discussed or included in this program.
 - Athena Cote: Could there be any collaboration with weekend food programs, such as End 68 Hours of Hunger?
 - If a school district participates in something like that, the program would likely not be excluded from the program.
 - Christina Lachance: some challenges I've heard of are the need for school staff to be able to plan meals in advance and the uncertainty of locally available food. I'm glad to see that farmers will be involved in reviewing these programs to help navigate the local food supply.

- A great example is the supply of apples in 2023, which was diminished due to a spring frost. Schools would need to be flexible to an extent. And farmers may be able to develop innovative ways to grow food in our climate if they have a reliable purchaser like a school district.

New Hampshire Children's Trust (Nathan Fink, Senior Director of Advancement)

- Prevention: balancing resources vs. stressors for NH families
 - Requires working with partners across the state; including Family Resource Centers for which NH Children's Trust is the facilitating organization
 - Working upriver of the problems we're seeing
 - Supporting FRCs with quality designations; data systems (i.e., Family Support Data System)
 - Standing up the Kinship Navigator Program
 - Develop the program and create awareness of these supports
- Strengthening Families: 5 Protective Factors
 - Parental resilience
 - Access to concrete support in time of need
 - Social connections (the most-studied protective factor – social connections lead to the development of other protective factors)
 - Knowledge of parenting and child development
 - Social and emotional development of children
- Training offered by the NH Children's Trust: How can service providers recognize protective factors and help families develop them? And how can we work more systematically to promote protective factors?
- What are the needs of families – a snapshot of data from the Family Support Data System.
 - Data helps the Children's Trust think about programming and what to target
 - What are parents coming to Family Resource Centers for? All families complete a concrete needs survey. In 2022, families reported their biggest challenges were paying for food (38% of families), utilities (37%), rent/mortgage (36%) and transportation (34%).
 - What do these families look like? 80% are female-led households.
 - Data is also used to raise awareness of all Children's Trust programs through program guides:
 - Kinship Navigation Program: Kinship Caregiver Guide
 - NH Child Care Scholarship Resource Guide
- ARPA-D contract from BCDHSC to promote the child care scholarship
 - Developed materials to simplify and promote the program
 - Materials include film projects, information in audio form, rack cards, post cards, brochures, window clings
 - NH Easy video guide is being developed as well
 - Data is being tracked on languages and geographic spread of material orders
- **Questions**
 - Kate Baker: Do we know the impact on scholarship applications?
 - Nathan: Our materials were released in late August
 - Chris S.: since Jan. 1 we've seen an increase of 700 children using the child care scholarships. This timeframe may have more to do with the expanded eligibility that started in January. We can get better data on the impact of the scholarship resource guide.
 - Was the application translated?

- Nathan: Yes, it's been translated into the most-requested languages
- Rep. DeSimone: Have there been any changes to kinship and fictive care collaborations with neighboring states?
 - Athena Cote: There's an interstate compact in place to monitor placements outside of NH. And there's a new kinship contract in the state that attempts to find kin in whatever state to provide care. If a child is placed outside of NH, the cooperating state would monitor their care.
- Rep. DeSimone: Have interstate compacts been updated since the Harmony Montgomery case?
 - Chris S.: Will follow up.
- Athena Cote: Do you have a sense of who's ordering the child care scholarship materials?
 - Nathan: yes, we can pull a variety of reports from our data system
 - Athena: can we see where there are gaps?
 - Nathan: We've been bombarded by child care providers and libraries. Once the initial wave of requests settles, we can analyze the gaps and target areas of the state where we had fewer requests and have less scholarship utilization.
- Michelle Lewis: How long do child care scholarship applications take to approve?
 - Chris S.: It varies depending on the situation. In some cases, we've heard that turnaround can be 1 week.
 - Michelle: NH Easy is widely understood to be challenging to use; knowing that child care scholarship goes through NH Easy may deter families from applying for the scholarships.
 - Chris S.: We are aware of the challenges with NH Easy, DHHS will be looking at customer service and the NH Easy website is going to be a focus.
 - Nathan: Our NH Easy mapping video will walk families through the online application process. It's a longer video, but it is step-by-step so we're hoping that is helpful as well.

Legislative Updates

- Christina Lachance: Senator Whitley could not be here but sent an email with legislative updates to the Council.
 - SB 404: Child Care Scholarship access for child care providers (pilot)
 - Hunger Free New Hampshire Act: reducing food insecurity – creates an opportunity for the Council to discuss universal free school lunch programs
 - SB 237: raised the income eligibility cap for NH child care scholarships
 - Senator Whitley calls attention to the fact that the Preschool Development Grant didn't lead to the development of publicly-funded pre-k/preschool.
 - Unfortunately, Preschool Development Grant funds could not be used to directly fund public preschool.
- Representative DeSimone: The Special Committee on Child Care worked on a number of areas to simplify the process for hiring child care employees. It was previously taking 90 days to get background checks, and it now takes 10 days. Also worked with the Fire Prevention Task Force to increase the number of infants allowed in child care programs. Modified some questions on the Child Care Scholarship application to make them clearer. The legislature plans to continue working to make child care in New Hampshire more accessible and higher quality.

Comment: Athena Cote, DHHS

- October 20th-26th is Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, DHHS will be making a push to inform the public about lead poisoning issues. (<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/programs-services/environmental-health-and-you/lead-poisoning-prevention-program>)

Comment: Richard Lavers, NH Employment Security

- December 1-January 29 is individual open enrollment for the state Paid Family and Medical Leave program. If any groups would benefit from a presentation to learn more about the program, please connect with Rich Lavers. (<https://www.paidfamilymedicalleave.nh.gov/>)

Public Comment:

- Sarah Fox, NH Alliance of Early Childhood Coalitions – Works with the EC coalitions and regions throughout the state. The Family Leave information is exciting. Is there a brief we can share with providers about the uptake of the program?
 - Rich Lavers: the annual report on the website is a good place to find data.
- Katie Brissette, Early Learning NH – There have been challenges with NH Easy. There have also been reports that District Offices are not all offering the same advice to providers.
 - Chris S.: Will follow up on this.

Motion to adjourn (Kate Baker)

Seconded (Shawn Jasper)

Motion approved by consensus.